

don't wanna be strangers no more by roadmaps_paperbacks (orphan_account)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - College/University, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, F/M, Fluff and Humor, I promise, Romance, Slow Burn, Trigger warnings in chapter notes, it's gonna be fun, trying to change the lack of lumax content

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Background Mileven - Relationship, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Lumax - Relationship, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers & Eleven | Jane & Dustin Henderson & Maxine Mayfield & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler, the parents are all here too

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Summary:

Max's laptop crashes three days before her last final in freshman year.

Thankfully, El is better at making friends and knows someone that can help.

1. fuck my life (no please don't, it's already fucked)

Author's Note:

HEY EVERYONE

This is an idea that really didn't leave me, after popping into my brain randomly. So, I finally wrote it out. Here's a Lumax College AU, I hope you enjoy!

"I'm gonna fail, El. Fail a class. Fail *this* stupid class."

"No, you're not. You're smart. And resourceful. And so am I, so we'll figure something out."

"If I were smart, I wouldn't have even taken this stupid fucking class."

"Max, c'mon, that kind of thinking isn't gonna get you any- "

"And if *you* were smart, you would've told me to not sign up for this fucking class-"

"Max, listen-"

"...and then we wouldn't be in this fucking mess in the first pla- "

“MAXINE!”

That causes Max to stop in her pacing tirade across the tiny empty space in their dorm, because that’s her name *and she hates it* but, also because El does not use it unless she’s mad at her.

Which, honestly, is unfair in this scenario because she’s *in a crisis*. She opens her mouth to say exactly that, but El beats her to it.

“You attended most lectures in this class. You took notes. And yeah, you don’t have your notes and our attempts to recover them have had limited success-”

“-no success.”

“-and you don’t have a textbook because you’re broke”, Max begins to say something here and yet again El beats her to it, “and they’re too expensive.”

“Unfairly so.”, Max adds, pouting a little, as she sits down heavily on the bunk bed beside El.

“You can borrow notes from someone in the class, can’t you? You must know someone.”, El offers.

“I don’t, it was a morning class, remember? And I can’t socialize before 10 AM.”

“Yeah, I know. I live with you.”

Max rests her head on El’s shoulder dejectedly, which isn’t completely comfortable because El’s shorter and has a bony shoulder but it’s still comforting.

She shuts her eyes, exhausted from all the worrying she’s been doing since her laptop crashed yesterday, three days before her last final.

She’s starting to think about giving up, when suddenly El grabs her arm.

“It was Lucas!”, she all but screams in Max’s ear.

“Jesus *fuckin*g Christ, Eleanor!”, Max screams back as she gingerly holds up a hand to her ear, startled.

El, in the meantime, has stood up and unlocked her phone, tapping away urgently.

Max stands up too, confused at, well, everything. That, honestly, has been a constant mood for what feels like forever

“Lucas Sinclair, he’s one of Mike’s best friends”, El explains as she texts someone. Mike, maybe?

“I know you think Mike hung the moon and the stars himself or whatever, but that does not make his friend a wizard who can fix all my problems, Eleanor”, Max tells her, which causes her to stop texting and throw a classic Hopper “don’t mess with me kid” glare.

“One, don’t call me Eleanor and two, I do not think Mike “hung the moon and the stars” “, she somehow manages to do the air quotes while texting, “I’m just a little infatuated with him, that’s it.”

Max *almost* scoffs.

“...and done.” El remarks, happily. “I just saved your sorry little butt, Mayfield”, there is a smile playing on her lips as she puts her phone back in her pocket.

“You better not be messing with me, McSmugface”, Max crosses her arms over her chest in an attempt to slow down her heartbeat, because there’s no way.

“Okay, so. Mike had mentioned in one of our earlier conversations that his roommate, Lucas had a morning class and so immediately I was like “wow, same!” and so we complained about how inconvenient the whole situation was to each other a few times...”

Max has starting biting the skin around her thumb nail at this point because El’s doing the rambling thing she does when she talks about Mike.

“...and Lucas actually mentioned having Professor Lawson to me when I met him...”

Max drops her hands and holds El up by her shoulders at that, face a mix of caution and urgency. She’s not kidding around anymore.

“No.”

“Yes, Max”

“Is he?”

“Yes, Max”

“And does he?”

“Yes, Max”

She sits down at that, slowly, mouth open and if El’s being honest, it’s hilarious and she wants to laugh. But she’s in the moment and the tension is real, so she doesn’t. It’s a close thing, though.

“Holy shit, Hopper”, she goes, quietly, “You fucking *saved* my sorry little ass.”

El finally lets out her laugh at that and then they're both cracking up, all of the tension and anxiety evaporating as the sound bounces off the walls of their dorm.

2. should not have said that, no, nope, not at all, never

Notes for the Chapter:

the boys are BACK!

not really tho, WHICH I'M VERY MAD ABOUT

seriously, where's season 3 duffers?

anyway coming back to the point, they meet now! its
meet cute time yay!!

plus dustin's here and man, do I love him.

take it away!

"I *cannot* believe you're selling a whole semester's worth of Lucas's work for sex, Michael", exclaims Dustin in the coffee shop. That they work at.

"Keep your voice down! We're in public, for god's sake", Mike hisses back as he takes off his apron and checks out.

"A-ha! So, you don't deny it", he winks conspiratorially at Will, who just shakes his head at him from the other side of the counter because Mike's the last one to check out. Again.

"I saw the wink, Dustin", Mike says back as he steps out from behind the counter. "And I didn't deny it, because I'm not even acknowledging it. I'm helping someone because they need it and I can help them."

“And because it will get you brownie points with the girl you’re in love with”, is what Dustin responds with. And the manner in which he says these words gets a reaction out of Mike.

And boy, is it a reaction.

“That’s not even- c’mon Dustin, pfft- I mean she’s not even that great- face wise- I would never even- and why would you even think- and that-that’s just so disrespectful- the nerve, the fucking nerve- how do I know you’re not the one in love with her? Huh? Are *you* in love with her?”

And if you know Mike Wheeler at all, you would know that this whole monologue (for lack of a better word) is accompanied by erratic hand gestures and ends with him trying to assume a defensive and somewhat cool posture and failing miserably.

And the whole thing makes Lucas feel better than he’s ever felt during the course of these finals and he lets out a chuckle, which, in turn, makes Dustin and Will worry a little less about him as they sit down in one of the booths.

Mission accomplished, Dustin thinks, right before he hears the bell.

All of them turn towards the sound, except Lucas who uses the lull in conversation to close his eyes for a bit.

Will nudges him when El and her roommate (*Max, her name is Max*) reach their table. He’s shocked to say the least. So much so, he doesn’t even get up to greet them with the others.

He looks on as the redhead who's wearing a *leather jacket*, of all things, says hi to his friends and looks Mike over like she's deciding whether she should pardon his death penalty or not and *holy hell*, how did he not notice her this whole semester?

"Stop shitting your pants, Wheeler, I'm not gonna kill you", is what he tunes back into and lets out a soft chuckle, because that's all that he's capable of in this state.

They sit down without any other words and he swears he hears her mutter, "at least not yet" from where she's sitting beside him.

He decides he likes her.

"I'm guessing you're my savior, then, my knight in shining armor?", she asks him and he's just realizing that he didn't even say hi to her and that she has blue eyes, so he bows his head before looking back up at her, in an attempt to regain his composure.

"That's me, yeah", he shifts to take the USB drive out of his pocket and hands it to her, "Here you go, your highness."

And then, his brain catches up to what his mouth just said and *holy shit*. Max is staring at him like he's mad which is absolutely correct because he is, he is absolutely crazy.

"I'm sorry, I haven't slept properly in weeks, that was so weird, I don't even know what- ", he stops because she laughs at him softly, and that's. Well, okay. It's good because she's not mad at him anymore but she's still laughing at him and that's not good. He was really hoping he'd left that behind in high school.

"It's okay, neither have I" she says, after she's done laughing, nodding at him in understanding.

She plugs in the drive into the laptop she brought with her. He figures it's El's from the desktop wallpaper: it's her with a Sheriff who has his arm around her and *shit*.

"Is that her dad?", he whispers to Max.

"What? Oh yeah" she whispers back, looking at El as she and Will listen to Dustin and Mike talk over each other, "she hasn't told you guys", she says, eyes wide, as the realization dawns upon her. "Wheeler is-

"- not gonna ask her out this semester, that's for sure.", Lucas finishes for her. She laughs at that, even as she shakes her head.

He smiles back at her and feels not exhausted for the first time in what feels like an eternity. And so, he forgives Mike for dragging him out of their dorm. For this reason, and this reason *only*.

Max hands him his drive back and he's reminded of all the work he

still has to do and he almost groans out loud as he pockets it.

“Word of advice, though, don’t give away your notes for free next time”, she says, teasing, “Street smarts.”

He looks up to see a soft smile instead of a mocking one and notices, for the first time, the exhaustion on her face. It’s gone in a second, though, and he wonders if he imagined it. She gets up so he can get out of the booth and he collects his things.

El tells him to keep drinking water (*she’s so sweet, really, what did the world do to deserve her*), Mike looks at El because he thinks no one is looking, and Dustin and Will wish him luck, *really* enthusiastically.

He says a collective goodbye to everyone at the table and walks out of the shop, shielding his eyes against the sun.

The thought of turning around and going back doesn’t leave his mind until he focusses back on studying.

3. goddammit, you're still cute

Summary for the Chapter:

I don't know what this chapter is, except that its
CUTE AS HELL

Max exchanges the oversized t-shirt she's been living in for the last 36 hours for another oversized t-shirt, pulls on an old pair of jeans, curses the lack of a hair dryer, grabs the coffee El brings her and practically runs out the door on the day of her Microeconomics final.

It takes her 43 seconds to realize that she's not wearing shoes and run back to her dorm.

Every single person on her floor has the pleasure of hearing her swear profusely that morning.

She grabs two extra pens, puts them in her pocket and sprints out of the building, hair flying behind her.

She gets to the exam hall well ahead of time, fortunately. She likes to make fun of the other students before an exam. It calms her down. Plus, it's fun.

She finds a spot to lean against on the wall and looks through these future intellectuals, as she runs her hands through her still a little damp hair. She's betting that at least 45% of these people haven't showered in the last 36 hours.

She's still insulting her peers in her mind when she sees him.

And yes, it has been two days, but she still can't believe that she never saw him before.

When she first met him, she used the expression “knight in shining armor” unironically for the first time in her life. And she used it in reference to him. Which was how she learnt that things could get from worse to worst *real* fast.

But it was nice. And he was nice.

(and so was his smile, not that that mattered)

So, no matter what, she couldn't seem to stop wanting to see him again in the two days that had passed. But now that he's here, she has no fucking clue what to say to him.

So, she resorts to her customary defense in awkward situations. She turns her face the other way, arranges her long hair in front of her face and looks down at her phone.

She scrolls though social media for a few minutes, trying to calm her nerves. She has an exam to write and she's not gonna fuck it up.

The doors open and people start filing in to the classroom. She hangs back a little to avoid getting caught in the middle of a sweaty, nervous throng.

There's a tap on her shoulder, right then. She turns around to see Lucas and she feels her stomach drop like it does on planes.

"Do you have an extra pen?", he's asking, and she notes that although he has some scruff on his jaw, he does look less dead than he did before.

"Uhh yeah, hold on", she answers as she reaches into her pocket, "Here you go, stalker", she says as she hands him the pen.

He looks up suddenly at that but he sees her teasing expression and his face eases into a smile.

She tells herself to calm the fuck down as she tucks her hair behind her ears.

"You ready?", he asks her as they walk in to the class.

"I just want to get this over with. Finals have been hell this semester", she frowns and he lets out a low whistle.

"Yeah, tell me about it. I don't think I'm ever getting rid of this shoulder ache."

“Ouch.”, she winces at that.

They're at the front of the class now and the invigilator is giving out instructions, like they've never written an exam before.

“Best of luck, your highness”, Lucas smirks at him and she thinks that it should be illegal.

“You're owning up to it now?”, she raises her eyebrows at him.

“Absolutely, yes. It's my thing now.”

She shakes her head at him, and he shrugs.

“Alright, Sinclair, see you on the other side”, the invigilator is asking them to be seated now, “Good luck, stalker.”

Two can play at this game, she thinks to herself, as she walks over to her seat.

She's very proud of the fact that she made it to her seat without turning around even once.

She pulls out a hair tie from her pocket, puts her hair in a ponytail, pushes all thoughts of boys from her head and focuses on kicking ass.

Notes for the Chapter:

kudos and comments are a respite from this heat!
love y'all!

4. it's too hot to be self examining deep emotions, and yet here we are

Summary for the Chapter:

firstly, thank you for the love on this fic!! I love y'all so MUCH!!!

secondly, the tone of this chapter is a lil different, because the boyz are BACK in HAWKINS

AND MY BEAUTIFUL BOY WILL BYERS IS HERE and SO IS JOYCE WHO IS MOTHER OF THE YEAR FOR ALL YEARS EVER

and Noah FINALLY got an award, so this one's for him

hope y'all like this chapter, HERE YOU GOOOOO

The only good thing about the Indiana heat is that they can spend all their time in Mike's basement, playing video games with the AC cranked up.

They have a daily routine now. Mike, being the only one with a car, picks them all up in the morning, the other three contribute to buy snacks and supplies, and then they don't have to get out of the house for anything.

Lucas runs in the mornings, enjoying the quiet of the cul-de-sac and the respite from the heat that the relatively cool mornings provide.

That's not to say he's a morning person, nope. No way. But he tried running in the evening the day he got back and the heat hadn't let up, at all. He ended up going back home more frustrated than he had

been before and sleeping for a day straight.

Then there's his family. His parents, Francesca and Ben, met at Northwestern when they were 21 and have been together ever since. His dad served in Iraq for a few months before he opened a hardware store in Hawkins. His mom is an accountant and manages the books at the store. His dad is very patriotic, (they have an American flag attached to the side of their house) which he mostly gets. They cried when Obama was elected President, both times. They cried when he gave his final address and then they cried when Trump was elected.

(even he cried at the last one)

He has a little sister who has a big mouth. Erica's three years younger than him and acts like she's his aunt, which is cute now that he doesn't live at home but was a pain in his ass in high school.

Three weeks into break, he and Will are walking to Melvald's, after Lucas's mom kicked them out for being "lazy old bags".

(okay, she only called Lucas a lazy, old bag because she adores Will and he can do no wrong in her eyes)

She handed them a shopping list beforehand, though.

He goes over to say hi to Mrs. Byers, squeezing her arm in greeting. She startles a little but then smiles brightly at him.

Will gives her a kiss on the cheek and her eyes crinkle at the corners as she smiles.

“What brings you two here, huh?”, she enquires.

“Mrs. Sinclair kicked us out for being lazy, but she did it with a shopping list”, Will explains as Mrs. Byers scans the bar codes on the shampoos.

“Ooh, that’s a good idea. Thank Francesca for me, will you, Lucas?”, Mrs. Byers responds, chuckling. Lucas feels like pouting, he really does.

“I’m gonna go get the dairy products”, is all he says in response, which makes Mrs. Byers laugh again.

He walks over to the dairy aisle, picking up a shopping basket. He’s humming Khalid when he sees her.

No way, he thinks as he stops dead in his tracks, *no fucking way*. His heart’s beating really fast.

There’s a girl in the dairy aisle, putting yogurt in her basket. She has long red hair and is wearing combat boots in this godforsaken heat. He can’t wrap his head around Max being in Hawkins, which is why he’s still standing there and staring, like a creep.

And then she turns towards him and it feels exactly like that first evening back in Hawkins. It's just some other girl with red hair.

God, he's losing his mind.

He sighs and lets the disappointment wash over him as he closes his eyes for a moment.

He rubs a hand over his face and decides that he's gonna stop thinking about her. He's been beating himself up over not talking to her sooner. The first person he actually wants to get to know at college, and it's the one he meets at the end of freshman year. But he realizes there's no point thinking about it like that.

Maybe they'll become friends next semester, maybe they won't. He couldn't care less, really.

It would be nice if it happened, though, wouldn't it?

"You done with the dairy, Lucas?", he hears Will say and turns around.

"Uhh no, I just, got distracted", he responds.

"C'mon lemme help", Will offers as he takes the basket from his hand.

They make quick work of the list, then, and are at the billing counter in 20 minutes.

(they don't see the redheaded girl again)

They're out of the store in another five and Will speaks up as they walk back to the Sinclairs'.

"You okay, Lucas?"

Lucas looks at his friend, squinting through the sun.

"Yeah. It's just" he pauses, phrasing his question in his mind, "Hawkins isn't as interesting as it used to be, is it?"

Will stops in his tracks. Lucas stops too, a little worried.

"Lucas, Hawkins was *never* interesting", he says.

"It used to be fun, though, it's not like we were bored growing up", Lucas says as he starts walking again.

"Yeah, but that's because it was home, *is* home"

“Yeah, I get that, at least. God only knows what my parents were thinking when they moved out here”, Lucas says, rolling his eyes, “I’m only coming back for the high school reunion.”

Will nods in agreement, but Lucas can tell he’s started to think in the earnest. Will gets like that sometimes, when his brain has started on a line of thought he knows is going to get him somewhere worthwhile. And it’s always worthwhile, really.

He checks his phone as they walk. There’s some texts from Nancy, Mike’s older sister. The Wheelers are visiting their grandparents, in beautiful Orlando, Florida and that’s the only reason the boys aren’t in Mike’s basement, playing video games.

Nancy Wheeler: *mike’s been texting someone for the last two hours, what’re you guys not telling me?*

Nancy Wheeler: *ok I peeped at his phone, who’s El??????*

Nancy Wheeler: *he’s smiling AT HIS PHONE SINCLAIR WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON*

Nancy Wheeler: *UGHHHH WHY CAN’T YOU GUYS REPLY TO MY TEXTS FAST ENOUGH*

Lucas considers leaving her on seen, just as revenge for all the times she’s done the same thing to him.

(although she has the extremely valid excuse of being an investigative journalist who has important work to do and he has no excuse, let alone a valid one)

He tells her that it's a girl he met at college and that they're friends and it's new and that she should not mention it, under any circumstance whatsoever.

This isn't new, the texting thing with Mike and El. They've been like this since they exchanged numbers a few months ago in the English Lit class that they have together. And Mike has become so annoyingly good at doing other things and texting at the same time, that he doesn't even know if them getting together would change anything.

"My mom has a friend from school, that she reconnected with over Facebook," Will starts saying and Lucas looks up from his phone, intrigue etched over his face, "He's a veteran too, by the way. Served in Afghanistan. Anyway, he was living in Indianapolis, after he served. But then, he lost his daughter to cancer and his wife divorced him. So, he moved out to California and took up a sheriff's job in a small town there."

"Man, I can't even imagine", Lucas says, stunned into silence.

They turn into the street his house is on. He almost missed the turn, despite the fact that he knows it like the back of his hand.

"Yeah, I know. But the point is, he said to my mom that he still sometimes wants to come back to Hawkins, more so now that his kid's in college. Even though the town he lives in right now is exactly

like Hawkins, except with a beach.”

“Nostalgia, perhaps?”

“Yeah, maybe”, Will says quietly, “I don’t know where I was going with this”

They walk up the driveway to his house and he hates the way his t-shirt starts sticking to his skin the moment they stop on the porch and that’s when he admits to himself that he doesn’t want to stay here anymore. No matter how much he loves his family and how much they love him, he decides then and there to stop beating himself up over wanting to leave.

Will fans his face as they wait for someone to open the door. Lucas swallows and clears his throat.

“I think I’ll go back to Chicago a week early”, Lucas tries to go for nonchalant, trying to act like he didn’t just spend three weeks agonizing over this, “Yeah, I’m gonna do it. If I can get the car, of course”

“Yeah, you should. Plus, we’ll get a headstart on the apartment search”, Will says and Lucas nods, knowing what he’s doing, not making a big deal out of the whole thing and helping him find reasons to give to his family. Lucas smiles at Will in gratitude and Will smiles right back in encouragement.

And Lucas didn't even have to ask once. One of the pros of being friends with the same people since elementary school, he thinks, as Erica opens the door to let them in.

Which gets him thinking about how he made only a few new friends at college, which, in turn, gets him thinking about Max, so he immediately pushes this line of thinking aside.

"God, you nerds aren't gonna let me sit down in peace for even a minute", she complains as she goes back to her room.

Lucas makes a face at her, because he wouldn't be a mature older brother if he let it go.

He and Will head up to his room, then. They listen to music and Will sketches as they talk about finding the aforementioned apartment. The boys had always planned on moving out of the dorms after freshman year, but they still wanted to live together.

Or at least as close as possible.

"We could get two flats in the same building, right? That could work well", Lucas suggests, "Or two flats in buildings close to each other? God, talking about all of this is pointless when we haven't even decided our goddamn budget yet"

Lucas is pacing the length of the room, which isn't all that big. There are shelves stacked with books, action figures, Star Wars, Marvel and

Harry Potter memorabilia on either side of the door. There's his bed, right in front of the door, where Will is sitting, sketchbook spread out over his crossed legs.

He hums and nods in agreement at all the right places, which is very helpful.

Will's phone rings, and he's a little startled by it.

"It's El", he tells Lucas, confused. Lucas motions for him to take the call and decides to get some water meanwhile.

He finds Will tapping away on his phone, when he gets back.

"El and Max are looking for a place too, they wanted the broker's number", Will tells him.

His heart speeds up at the bare mention of her name, like the dumb, desperate idiot it is. *God, he needs to get a fucking grip.*

"Oh alright."

Will puts his phone down and then asks, cautiously, "What do you think will happen when they actually start dating?"

It takes him a moment to comprehend the question properly.

‘When’ he says, not ‘if’, and he’s right. They’re far beyond the ‘when’ now.

“This hasn’t gone well ever before, y’know”, Will continues.

And he’s right again. They’ve had girlfriends (and a boyfriend, in Will’s case) before. Melanie, who he dated in senior year was always complaining about how he spent too much time with his friends.

When it ended, he couldn’t even blame her because they never made an honest effort to include her in the group. Which was an awful thing to do.

“And El is such a great person, she’s *friends* with us, for god’s sake”, Will’s voice shakes him out of his thoughts, “She doesn’t deserve to be hurt like that and I want to stay friends with her”, his voice is small and Lucas can hear the panic creeping into it.

Lucas sits down on the bed, “We’re friends with her, Will. All we have to do is stay that way even after those two start dating. We can stay friends with a girl”, he says looking right at Will.

“That sounds right, yeah”, Will responds, easing up a bit, looking back up at him, “Two girls, actually.”

“Wait what?”, Lucas asks, caught off guard.

“Max, too. They’re best friends. Plus, she’s pretty badass.”

(needless to say, Lucas’s heart wants to jump out of his chest right now)

“Yeah”, he manages to say, but doesn’t look at Will at all as he does so.

“Nancy found out about El, by the way”, he says trying to change the subject and it makes Will turn to him sharply and then face palm and groan, simultaneously.

“Of course, she did, he’s smiling at his phone all the damn time”, Will says, picking up his face from his palms, “like a goddamn fool”.

He puts his face back in his palms, then.

“Does Mike know that she knows?”

“Not yet.”

Will flops down on Lucas’s bed.

“Are we going to have to go through another Wheeler Siblings Summer Blowout?”

“A 70% chance, I would say”

A pause.

“God, I hate Hawkins”, Will says finally and Lucas cracks up.

Notes for the Chapter:

I would really, really REALLY love it if you gave feedback on this because I desperately need it for this one. I'm trying to figure out how to write their relationships and tell me what you think about the backstory? PLEASE

reviews would be totally tubular. <3

5. little girl, big city

Notes for the Chapter:

hi hello this is a max focussed chapter, backstory and everything. I cried writing this.

there's mentions of assault and death, so trigger warnings for that.

other than that I love my ginger daughter, please come scream with me about it.

also if it wasn't clear before, I LOVE MAX AND EL AND THEIR FRIENDSHIP.

AND THANK YOU FOR THE LOVE YOUVE ALL GIVEN THIS FIC I JUST

GOD

I CANT EVEN

just go ahead and read the chapter

When El said that one of them would have to go out to Chicago beforehand, Max happily volunteered.

Dislike was a pretty strong word, and it's what she felt towards her home. Well, not her home, her family.

When she was 12, her mom and dad got a divorce, which wasn't the worst part, per se.

The worst part wasn't even her dad losing the custody battle.

The worst part was moving from San Francisco to Harrisville, California six weeks into the school year, to live with her stepfather and stepbrother.

They were not good people, is the simple way to put it. The specific way, is that they were abusive and toxic. Hence, the coveted position of worst thing to happen was awarded to living with them.

While his stepfather never hit her mom or her, he did hit Billy, and that threat always lingered in the air. And Billy, the less that is said about him, the better.

Billy moved out after he graduated high school, and they heard from him only once after that.

Neil closed in on himself after that. He wouldn't talk to anyone more than strictly necessary, not even his wife.

He would take his car and just disappear for several hours on end. Her mom thought he was having an affair, for a while.

When she was in sophomore year, she opened the door one day to a dejected looking Hopper, with his sheriff's hat in his hand and his head bowed.

Her stepfather had been in a car accident.

Her mom took it better than Max had thought. She kicked Billy out, after he came back for the funeral and refused to leave.

She left her receptionist job and took over Neil's business (*Neil had written Billy out of his will after he left*).

And she was really fucking good at it. It was an import business that imported hardware and stationary into the state and distributed it to local vendors and she somehow managed to increase profits every quarter.

"You learn a lot about a business when you're working its front desk all day", she'd once told Max.

She also put Max in therapy, which wasn't that weird to her, El had always had a therapist that she visited every week all through high school

Their relationship was still very weird, though. It's tough, when you didn't talk about things when they were happening, to talk about them when the situation has changed and time has passed. They're working on it though.

She gets a part-time job as a librarian's assistant after she comes back from college. It keeps her busy, until she gets bored of it, despite how mean all the librarians are.

She spends most of her time at the beach, with El. They learn to surf (read: try to), laugh at Hopper when he grumbles about “these goddamn problems ruining my life”, tease him about the online girlfriend he has, which leads to Hop and Max teasing El about her “just friend” Mike.

She wants to be there when Hop finds out they’re dating. For that to happen, they will actually have to start dating though.

She has a fling with a guy she meets at the Waffle House. He works there, and they make out in the side alley a few times.

By the time summer ends and she packs up her things, she doesn’t even remember his name.

El starts to admit that she likes Mike, a lot. Which is gross, but she sounds happy about it, so. Whatever.

It’s not like that means Max isn’t ready to castrate him, should the need arise.

They also make A Major Adult Decision. They’re gonna rent an apartment and live off campus. Woo yayy, so exciting.

Not.

Absolutely not. They’re thoroughly unprepared for this when they decide, half drunk on their last night in Chicago, drinking box wine

in their cramped dorm and just, feeling happy (*so very happy*).

Max smiles at the memory, as she sits in an Uber headed for their (!) apartment. She's here a week before El, so she can get some basic setup done.

He's here too, her brain provides and she pushes it down. Mike and his band of nerds is also getting their own apartment this year and Lucas is their designated early arrival. He's been in the back of her head all summer, not that she would ever admit it, even to herself.

El didn't fail to mention that their apartments are just a couple blocks from the girls'.

Their apartment is fully furnished but they do still have to buy linen, utensils, that kind of stuff. The prospect of doing that kind of shopping, the kind that's essential to living, is, well, it's terrifying.

But she and El spent a whole week making a detailed list of things that she would have to buy (*most of the week was spent researching because they had no fucking clue*).

El wanted to come too, but Max knew the old man would appreciate her staying for a week more. Not that he helped in convincing her, by the way.

Eleanor Hopper has a very intense stubborn streak, and she gets it from her father.

She thinks about her own dad. She flew out to LA to visit him, and her stepmother, for a week and it was fun. They went shopping for posters and decorative stuff that she's going to put up in her new room. A little awkward, but still fun.

That reminds her of her mother, who got her a simple glass vase as a housewarming present while promising to visit for Thanksgiving and holding back tears.

Sometimes, she thinks about telling her mother to just cry and let it all out.

She's shaken out of her thoughts when the cab stops abruptly. She gathers her things, gets out, grabs her two suitcases, pays the driver and watches as the car leaves and then turns out of the street, hoping to stifle the nervousness bubbling up in what feels like her whole body.

She inhales deeply, and her nose is filled with a distinct smell that can only be described as *city*. It helps her steady herself.

She braces herself as she grips her suitcases as tight as possible, knuckles turning chalk white.

If El were here, she'd be making up a song under her breath and it would most definitely be called "young girl, big city", she thinks suddenly and it makes her grin like a lunatic on the sidewalk.

She walks into the building, there's a winding staircase right in front of her, an elevator beside it and a hallway lined with apartment doors. She looks for apartment number 06, that's where their landlord is supposed to live.

She knocks lightly on the deep green door and waits. It takes a couple minutes until the door is opened by an old African-American woman, who's wearing glasses and a red and white patterned nightgown. Max smiles politely in greeting.

"Hello, I'm Max. My friend and I are renting out flat no. 42. I was told the landlord lives here?"

"Yeah, she does", the old lady (*or landlady now?*) says as she looks Max up and down, skeptically, "Gilda Thompson."

She extends her hand and Max shakes it.

"Max Mayfield."

"Come on in. I'll make you some iced tea, then you can go up and get settled in, alright?", her demeanor has changed completely, and she's smiling at Max.

"I don't – oh okay, sure – thanks, Ms Thompson.", she calls out the thanks because Ms. Thompson has already walked back into her

home.

She carries her luggage inside into the foyer and looks around. There's an open plan kitchen to her right and a hallway that leads to two bedrooms on her left.

"Don't just stand there, now. Sit down", Ms. Thompson calls from the kitchen.

Max sits down on the tan, what-feels-like-leather-but-she-can't-really-tell, couch gingerly.

Ms. Thompson comes back with two tall glasses of iced tea and sits down beside Max, handing her one of the glasses.

"Thank you, Ms. Thompson", she says after taking a sip of the too sweet tea.

"Call me Gilda, sweetie", Ms. Thompson – Gilda – replies, "Now tell me did your parents name you something as godawful as Max or did you choose it yourself"

Coming from anyone else, Max would have retaliated with a punch. But when Gilda says it, she can't help but laugh.

"I chose it for myself, my parents named me Maxine."

“Oh alright”, she says, nodding, “That’s somehow worse”, and Max laughs again.

“What is your roommate named?”

“Eleanor Hopper”, Max answers after gulping down some of the iced tea, “but we call her El.”

“Of course, you do”, Gilda says, smiling, “How long have you two known each other?”

“Since we were twelve, we met in middle school.”

“That’s a long time, alright”, she shakes her head and then gets up, “I’ll go get the keys and the papers.”

And that’s when it hits her. Papers, keys, their own apartment.

Fuck.

See, she’d forgotten that she isn’t just here to drink iced tea and chat with Gilda. She is here to live in her apartment.

Gilda appears from the hallway with the papers in her hands, smiling wide and tells her where to sign. She brings out the two sets

of keys from somewhere in her kitchen and hands them to her.

She doesn't even know which key opens the front door and yet, she's excited. She grips the keys tightly and tells Gilda, "Let's go."

Notes for the Chapter:

not a lot of lumax in this one, but I had fun writing it. tell me what you think??? or just scream in the comments???? both are welcomed wholeheartedly.
<3

6. didn't know pizza could get any better and yet

Notes for the Chapter:

HOO BABY

okay

I should let you know I do a little dance whenever I get a notification for a comment or kudos, SO HUGE THANK YOU FOR THAT SENDING LOTS OF LOVE YOUR WAY

I've been excited for this chapter since I started writing this fic, there's so much lumax here, I absolutely loved writing this.

they're real adorable y'all

ENJOY

Lucas feels like he's floating on a croissant. He's walking from the first apartment he's ever rented, that he's going to be living in with his best friends, to the nearby pizza place to get dinner after a day spent getting in deliveries of mattresses and pillows and arranging them.

Oh, and he has a brand, new, shiny, snazzy car.

Okay, it's not brand new, it's his mom's old Camry. But it's still shiny. And it's his.

He's tired in a good way, excited in a calm way, there's a light evening breeze and SZA is playing in his ear.

As mentioned before, he's floating on a croissant.

He walks into Sal's, a standard American pizza place, and just the smell of pizza and the distinct greasiness in the air makes his stomach rumble a little in anticipation.

He sits down in a booth by the window and pulls out his earphones. The waitress comes over to take his order, (*pepperoni pizza and a coke*) and then he's alone again.

"Hey, stalker", a voice says behind her, he turns around and he almost doesn't believe it.

Max Mayfield is standing there, one corner of her mouth quirked up in a smirk, a smattering of freckles across her face, her red hair in a bun, wearing a tank top, baggy ripped jeans and Doc Martens.

"Wow, hi!", he exclaims as he gets up, shakes his hand and very successfully ignores the weird tingle that spreads up his arm.

Max grins at him as she sits down opposite him. He would smile back, but he's been doing that since he saw her.

"Technically, *you're* the stalker, because I was here first", he remarks

and Max raises one eyebrow at him.

(*get a grip, Lucas*)

Before she can say anything, the waitress comes over to take Max's order (*pepperoni pizza and a pepsi*) and drops off a bowl of nachos.

"When did you get here?'," Lucas asks her.

"This afternoon. El's gonna be here next week", she replies.

"And you're here to get the setup done and secure the apartment so anyone else doesn't take it?"

"Just like you, yeah", she replies, nodding

"Oh, okay", he says. He begins to say something else, but she seems to realize something.

"El told me that", she says quickly, "I didn't – I wasn't – you know-", she finishes hopelessly.

"I get it, you weren't *stalking* me", he teases back, mockingly serious, nodding.

“Haha very funny”, she deadpans and throws a nacho at him.

He catches it with his mouth and she rolls her eyes at that.

It’s pretty darn cute.

“Do you have a lot of work to do?”, she asks.

“It’s furnished, but we still do have to buy a lot of stuff”, he answers, “Or more accurately, I do. You?”

“Yeah, same. Bedsheets, curtains, utensils, those kinda things. The mattresses and pillows got delivered today and just setting that up made me tired”, she says rubbing her temples with her fingers, “The delivery guys did most of the work, I just stood there anxiously.”

“I know, right?!”, he exclaims, “How does that even happen?”

The waitress brings out their food then, and oh Lucas has never, ever been happier than he is in this moment.

He rubs his hands together and asks Max, “Shall we?”

She laughs, delighted and Lucas just wants to keep doing that, making her laugh.

They dive in then, too invested in pizza to keep up a conversation.

Max picks up the conversation after they've both had a slice each.

"You drove here? From Nowhere, Indiana?", Lucas nods in reply, "Again, I know that you live in Indiana because of El."

"And I know you two live in California because of Mike", Lucas remarks, "How was your summer, by the way?"

"It was alright. Not much different than high school summers", Max pauses to sip on her soda, "Spent too much time at the beach, put on shittons of sunscreen... oh I did work at the library. That was fun, the old ladies were mean to everyone young except me", she finishes, a small, amused smile on her face and Lucas chuckles.

"Can't relate, the ladies at Hawkins Public Library despise all four of us with a passion", he tells her.

"But why? I mean, you guys aren't *that* bad"

"Uh thanks for the vote of confidence, Mrs. Hoffman is gonna hate you now."

Max laughs at that and Lucas finds out that his heart knows how to do backflips.

He focusses on telling the story.

“When we were in middle school, Dustin issued a few books from the library and when he went to return them, one of them was missing. He went back to look but he couldn’t find it. He had some money saved so he told Hoffman that he’d pay to replace it but she insisted on calling his mom and complaining about it-”

“No way!”, Max exclaims, outraged, and she looks it too. Her mouth is still open and her eyebrows are furrowed together.

“Yeah, she did. And to make matters even worse, Mr. Henderson had left them that same year and Mrs. Henderson and Dustin had just started to get used to life without him”, he remembers it still, how Dustin never wanted to stop playing, but still was always itching to go back home and check on his mom.

It was one of the most frustrating things ever because both Dustin and her mom were like, the sweetest people of all time and he has vivid memories of getting mad about how they just didn’t deserve any of it.

Lucas waits for Max to tell him to continue, for some reason.

Max's face just drops at that, all the anger draining out of her as she buries her head in her hands for a moment and sighs, before looking back up at him.

She tucks some stray strands of red hair behind her ears before she speaks.

"Please tell me you got her back good", she says finally, picking up her slice of pizza.

Lucas smiles, feeling smug.

"Yeah, we egged her house."

Max *chokes* on her bite.

Lucas picks up her glass of soda and hands it to her, trying to help. She drinks the whole glass and then clears her throat.

"Are you seriously telling me that you and your whole band of Nice Nerds egged an old lady's house?", she asks, her mouth pursed.

"And her car."

Her eyebrows have shot up a little now, her eyes are wide and her

mouth is half open, and it's the cutest thing he's ever seen.

Max bursts out laughing and it's like he's seeing her for the first time. Her eyes light up, crinkling at the corners and he doesn't even realize when he joins in on her laughter.

She's still laughing softly when Lucas starts to explain.

"We biked over to a different grocery store than the one Will's mom works at, bought three dozen eggs, biked over to Hoffman's house and threw the eggs at her windows, doors, walls, everything", he recalls, "All of it was just, covered in egg", he makes a disgusted face because it was really, really gross, "and we screamed things like 'kid hater' even though she wasn't home", that sets Max off again and yeah, Lucas's heart is an Olympic level gymnast now, "the whole time we screamed and it felt like – like what I imagine skydiving or one of those crazy adventure things feel like."

"That's just -", Max says, still chuckling, "I should've known you guys had a crazy streak."

She shakes her head at him, a small smile on her face, eyes sparkling, under the fluorescent lighting of the restaurant and he decides that *that* is the prettiest she's ever looked.

He shrugs, because really, what else can he do.

They finish the rest of their food, pay and walk out of the restaurant

together.

The breeze is still there, and he can see the moon now. No stars, though.

“Which way are you?”, Lucas asks.

“Oh, a couple blocks here”, Max replies, pointing to the right.

“Hey, me too!”, he says, happily and Max smiles too, “Our building is three blocks away.”

“So, you’re gonna follow me home, Stalker?”, she says, her voice ringing out in the street as she starts walking.

“No, I’m gonna walk you home”, Lucas says when he catches up to her, “Because my mother raised a gentleman.”

Max raises her eyebrows at him and he starts to panic a little.

“Not that I think you can’t take care of yourself, because I don’t”, he starts to clarify, “I think you’re pretty badass, actually and I -”

“Why?”, she stops walking.

“Huh?”, he stops too, confused.

“Why do you think that?”

“Ohh”, he says, a little too loudly, “You don’t seem like you’d take anyone’s bullshit, at all.”

Max is still looking up at him with an unreadable expression on his face but she gestures at him to start walking again, so maybe she’s okay.

Then he remembers something.

“And one of the boys told me that you and El know how to skateboard, and I, personally, as a rule of thumb, do *not* mess with anyone who knows how to skateboard, ever.”

“Fucking hell, why does El tell you guys these things?”, she exclaims, a little embarrassed and mostly amused, “She didn’t show you a picture, right?”

“I knew I should have asked for photographic evidence, dammit.”

Max laughs softly and stops in front of a red brick building.

“This is me.”

“Oh, looks nice.”

“Yeah, it’s good on the inside too, just gotta set it up.”

“You’ll get it done, El’s probably made you a list or two.”

“Excuse you, we made the lists together.”

He laughs and looks down.

“Hey, I have a suggestion.”

He looks back up at the hesitance in her voice.

“Yeah?”

She’s biting her lip.

“Do you wanna go shopping with me tomorrow? For the apartment

stuff?”, she doesn’t meet his eyes till the end of her question.

He stays quiet for a few seconds, comprehending what she said.

“It’s totally okay if you don’t want to though!”, she’s holding out her hands in front of her, “It’s only a -”

“No no no, that’s a great idea, actually”, he stops her before she backs out, “Completely up for it.”

She smiles before she speaks up.

“Okay, so just”, she pulls out her phone from her pocket and Lucas getting the hint, reaches into his pockets to get his too.

They exchange phones, put in their numbers and Max smiles at him when she hands it back to him.

“So... just text me the time tomorrow morning?”

“Okay, yes”, then he remembers, “Can we not do it early morning though? I’m not much of a morning person.”

“Oh thank god”, Max sighs, “Neither am I.”

“Guess I should get going, then”, he says, shoving his hands in his pockets, “See you tomorrow?”

“See you tomorrow”, Max smiles back at him and walks in to the building.

He still feels like he’s floating on a croissant as he walks to his apartment building.

Notes for the Chapter:

eeeeeeeeee what do you think???? I'm pretty hyped for the next one too, but I haven't even started writing it. so tell me what you think? and send me suggestions?

comments are to me what eggos are to el. <3

Author's Note:

holy shit whaaaaaattt

you made it here? thank you for that, so much. leave a comment? please? I'm but a simple writer starved for feedback.